

Michael F. Easley  
Governor



State of North Carolina  
Office of the Governor

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Contact: Sarah Williamson  
Phone: 919/733-5612

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**GOV. EASLEY PRESENTS JIMMIE JOHNSON WITH LAUREL WREATH AWARD**

**RALEIGH** – Gov. Mike Easley today presented NASCAR Nextel Cup Champion Jimmie Johnson with North Carolina's Laurel Wreath Award, the state's highest honor for outstanding athletic achievement by residents or those representing the state.

"Jimmie Johnson is a tremendous driver, businessman and friend," said Easley. "I am proud to recognize him for his achievements, and to be his backup driver."

Johnson, age 31, drives the No. 48 Lowe's car for Hendrick Motorsports in NASCAR's Nextel Cup series. He started racing a 50cc motorcycle at age five. His parents and two younger brothers spent their weekends either preparing for or participating in races. By age eight, Johnson had won the 60cc class championship. He gained experience at various levels of motor racing, including driving dune buggies and off-road trucks. He got his first taste of racing on hard surfaces in 1995 in the American Speed Association Series which paved the way for his move to NASCAR.

Johnson made his Busch Series debut in 1998 and drove in his first Nextel Cup race in October 2001. He quickly made his mark on the nation's fastest growing sport, winning 27 races and finishing among the top five drivers in 74 out of 118 races. Johnson finished in the top 10 in driver points in each of his first six full NASCAR seasons. He won the 2006 Nextel Cup championship after winning the Daytona 500, the All-Star Challenge and the Brickyard 400. So far this season, Johnson has won four races, more than any other Nextel Cup driver, and is currently 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Cup standings behind Hendrick teammate Jeff Gordon.

"Jimmie is not just a great athlete, he is a great person," said Easley. "He shares his success with those who have not been as fortunate."

Johnson and wife Chandra promote the Jimmie Johnson Foundation which is dedicated to assisting children, families and communities in need throughout the United States. Charities supported by the foundation include the American Red Cross, Make-A-Wish and the Victory Junction Gang Camp.

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*NOTE: To receive a copy of a photo of Jimmie Johnson with Gov. Easley, call the Press Office at 919/733-5612.*

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Governor's Press Office  
State Capitol, Raleigh, NC 27603-8001  
(919) 733-5612 - Toll Free 1-800-662-7005  
FAX (919) 733-5166